

**MEETING SUMMARY #2  
WSF COMMUNITY MEETING  
INTER-ISLAND FERRY, SAN JUAN ISLANDS, WA  
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2009 2:15 – 4:20 P.M.**

*Note: This meeting summary represents notes from the Washington State Department of Transportation Ferries Division (WSF) Community Meeting, and is not a formal transcript or minutes. It is provided as a record for the staff and public in attendance, and other interested parties.*

**Welcome and Introductions**

WSDOT Assistant Secretary David H. Moseley

David welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming. He introduced his WSF staff members as well as several Ferry Advisory Committee (FAC) members who were in attendance, then briefly went over the agenda and noted that there would be time for public comment at the end of the meeting. David mentioned that the meeting would be slightly different from other meetings because the agenda would be gone through twice in order to allow people getting on at different stops to hear about all the issues.

**Route & Community Specific Issues**

WSDOT Assistant Secretary David H. Moseley, WSF Planning Director Ray Deardorf

The first route-specific topic that David and Ray discussed was the winter schedule changes for the San Juans. Ray mentioned that Dave Remagen asked him to specifically thank the FAC members for the intensive work over the last few weeks to help produce the new winter schedule. The winter schedule has, since 2003, been reduced compared to fall and spring. Winter is more of a challenge to schedule and on top of the normal issues we are also adjusting to the directive from the Coast Guard to eliminate touring watches. We are struggling to adjust to that change. The first attempt was in fall, with mornings staying basically the same and evenings being different. The last sailing from Anacortes was an hour earlier than tradition, which we've heard a lot about from customers. For winter we were able to make that last sailing later even than it had been before. It is now 8:55 versus the traditional 8:25 or the recent 7:25. We were able to make this change and still meet other patterns that we need in the San Juans. Shaw had no sailings after 6:30 on the fall schedule; we have restored that with the 8:55 sailing. After Thanksgiving weekend one of the Super Class vessels will be replaced with the smaller Sealth through February.

### Clarifying Questions from Audience

1. It is important that everyone who is looking at this schedule handout knows that it is not a final version. Wait for the final printed version before relying on these sailing times. This is the general shape, but the committee is looking at it closely to see if there are any problems. The changes would be no more than 5-10 minutes.
2. On the Wednesday and Thursday before the 4<sup>th</sup> of July we had some serious problems. There were 120+ cars left overnight in Anacortes. The boats knew they were in trouble by 1 or 2 pm. What can we do to prevent this in the future?

*The 4<sup>th</sup> was a mess; we are aware of that. It was very hard on the San Juans traffic through the weekend. We need some additional service for heavily traveled periods. Anything beyond our regular service requires more crews and more fuel. We will do everything we can, but we don't have the money for that. Starting the new biennium, there was no savings to apply on that weekend. We will talk to the Legislature; the budget is looking better this year with no deficit in the first quarter. We will keep a watch on the budget and hopefully we will have money to apply next year. Why couldn't you have taken the inter-island ferry? It only had 8 cars on it. You could take it to alleviate some of that; maybe you could plan on that for the future. You would be inconveniencing 8 people instead of 120. That's a good point; we will look into that.*

We would like to work with Dave Remagen to establish a holiday weekend schedule. We want to replace some interisland trips with trips to the mainland.

*We will look at doing that for those time periods.*

3. I would like to thank you for listening to our concerns and doing what you can. We think you really have tried and we appreciate it. We feel good about the communication.

*Thank you very much. The FAC came together very quickly on this and we appreciate that.*

4. What can we do to be proactive about finding out about schedule changes? Should we solicit to see if there are changes coming? Or attend meetings?

*Stay in contact with your FAC.*

5. From a school district standpoint, we would be best served by this all year round.
6. It doesn't include Sidney that's why we all like it better.

The next route-specific issue that David discussed was the crew endurance changes. We have been able to use touring watches on a number of routes over

the years. A touring watch involves the staff coming on the boat to work 8 hours, staying on the boat and resting for 8 hours, then working another 8 hours. This means the crews were working 16 hours within a 24 hour period. The Coast Guard became concerned because standard Maritime practice is no more than 12 hours worked in a 24 hour period. We received a directive from the Coast Guard that initially said no more touring watches would be allowed after September of 2009. We appealed and requested a variance in order to maintain touring watches in the San Juans. Without touring watches there would be no boats tied up in Friday Harbor overnight, which means no emergency exit off of the island is available. The Coast Guard allowed us to continue touring watches on the two boats that tie up at Friday Harbor with new regulations in place about staff rest time. The touring watches are gone everywhere else and they will not be coming back. One way we were able to mitigate the resulting difficulties was to work with our employees' bargaining units to establish 10 hour shifts at straight time. We have a number of the 4 tens in the fall and winter schedule; it doesn't solve the problem but it helps. Part of our ability to adjust the winter schedule is based on those ten hour shifts. We wanted to talk about this today because it particularly affects the islands. We need to work with these new regulations; we know that the crews loved the touring watches and hated to see them go because the ten hour shifts are harder on them. However we have to adjust to reality, and we will be keeping a close eye on the crews that are still doing touring watches to make sure their fatigue levels are dropping.

### **Clarifying Questions from Audience**

1. Does this new endurance program apply to all the crews in the system?  
*Only the deck crews, not the engine room crews.*  
They are all taking classes and keeping a log?  
*Yes, they have forms that they need to fill out, and they are doing that.*  
*They are adhering to the Coast Guard requirements so that we may keep the remaining touring watches that we have.*  
How will the Coast Guard know the difference if they're not checking on the people who work regular hours?  
*They are concerned with the 16 hours in a 24 hour period.*  
They're more likely to become a highway statistic now because they are driving more for shorter shifts.  
*We have to work with this as best we can. We didn't ask for this, but we have to work through it. We need your patience and the patience of the crews as well. We had 20-25 touring watches before and now we are down to 2.*
2. Have you gotten any feedback from the Coast Guard since the switch?

*Yes, we meet with them every month. We like the meetings; they are very helpful. They are shadowing 3 of our watches across the entire system to see if the ten hour shifts are working out.*

### **New Vessel Program**

WSDOT Assistant Secretary David H. Moseley

David discussed the construction of the new ferry at Todd Shipyard. We are currently undergoing construction of the first 64-car ferry. The project is on time and on budget; it is looking like a boat at this point rather than a bunch of pieces of steel. We have monthly meetings with Todd Shipyard which are very informative. It will be completed by the end of June next year, and then there will be testing and sea trials for 4-6 weeks. We expect the new vessel to be in service on the Port Townsend / Keystone run in August of 2010. This is our first new boat in 10-12 years and we are very pleased. We recently had a bid opening for 2 more 64-car ferries with an option for a third. The bid came in much better than the first bid, so even though there was only one bidder again, there was still a significant savings.

### **Clarifying Questions from Audience**

1. How many cars does this boat hold?  
*The Evergreen State holds about 80 cars.*
2. For clarification on what the new 64-car ferry is like physically, it's about the size of one of the steel electrics?  
*Yes.*
3. I'm from the Visitor's Bureau, and I would like to know about the painting of the vessels. Visitors see the rusty boats and it's kind of embarrassing.  
*The Chelan goes into dry-dock this winter and will get a paint job. The Yakima goes in for a partial paint job in the spring, and then it will get the paint job completed in 2011. We can't leave it in dry-dock for too long, so it will get split up. The Hyak is scheduled for paint in the fall of 2010. Those three are the rustiest and will get paint in the next year and a half.*
4. Will the new boats be more fuel efficient?  
*Yes, especially compared to the steel electrics. We are also actively looking for alternate fuels. Fuel is our largest cost other than labor, so we are aggressively looking for cleaner and less expensive fuel options.*
5. Have you made the decision as to where the 2<sup>nd</sup> two 64-car boats will go?  
*The 2<sup>nd</sup> boat would go to the Port Townsend / Keystone run in the summer months, and would be available in the San Juans in the winter. The 3<sup>d</sup> boat will replace the Rhody on the Point Defiance / Tahlequah run.*
6. Why are we building additional 64-car boats rather than the 144-car boats?

*We want boats, and we want them as cheaply and as quickly as we can get them. We have an aging fleet; the Rhody will be 65 years old before its retired. We need more 144-car boats but they are more expensive; the logic is that something is better than nothing.*

7. What have you done about the law that only allows our ferries to be built in Washington State?

*There was a bill introduced to the Legislature last session to end that restriction; it did not pass. The Legislature's position is that although there may be some minor savings there, the value of keeping shipyard jobs in the Puget Sound as well as applying our own environmental requirements is worth the premium to build here. Obviously competition helps pricing, and we have only had one bidder for the last three bid openings, but most of the Washington shipyards are involved in the bids from Todd as subcontractors. The Legislature is fully aware of these issues, and that policy is still in effect; our boats will be built in Washington.*

### **Vehicle Reservations Pre-Design Study**

WSDOT Assistant Secretary David H. Moseley, WSF Operations and Project Manager Doug Schlieff

David gave a brief overview of the events involved so far with WSF conducting this pre-design study. The Legislature has directed us to do a pre-design study of what a reservations system would look like. What would the IT / back office technology have to be to serve the needs of our customers? What business rules would need to be in place to make the system work well and be flexible? The Legislature wanted to see this study applied to a specific route, so we chose Edmonds / Kingston because that run has so many of the characteristics that are present in other routes. It is a challenging route, which is what we wanted, to really show whether reservations can work or not. The Kingston side has sufficient space, whereas the Edmonds side does not. We have been working with a partnership group made up of users from both sides of that route for months, which is a terrific group and has given us lots of important feedback. The Legislature directed us to do this and report the results back to them – they have not authorized us to implement reservations anywhere. They want to see the pre-design study to see how reservations would work, and to make sure that it would be helpful to customers rather than an inconvenience. This is only worth doing if it can help our customers as well as help us spread our demand better. David then introduced Doug as the project manager for the study. Doug has been with WSF for many years and is a daily ferry commuter. We wanted someone involved in this study that uses the ferries everyday and can ask the question: how would that work for me?



Doug continued the discussion by explaining some of the reasons for reservations. Most have heard about the steel electrics being pulled from service. That event combined with the fact that our entire fleet is aging has led to all of the funding being directed toward building new boats. There is no funding for terminal expansion. Because of the financial situation that the state is in, we have had to identify some strategies that will allow us to better use the space that we have without expanding any of our facilities. A reservation system may be one way to do that. It was identified in our Long Range Plan and the Legislature directed us to take a closer look at this possibility. As we go through the pre-design study, some of our goals are to make reservations easy to use and convenient; we have many different types of users like tourists, commuters and freight, and we want to maintain flexibility for each of those user types. We want to make sure that the reservations system would meet the needs of our riders and also work for WSF by being able to integrate with our current ticketing system. Our intent is to learn first from our own experience with reservations, which are in place on our Anacortes / Sidney, and Port Townsend / Keystone runs already. We also have a freight reservations program for the San Juan Islands. If we get approval and funding for reservations, those places are where we would implement the new reservations system first before expanding to a different route. We are continuing to work with our Edmonds / Kingston partnership group, which has been very helpful and has brought many new things to light for us. The next step will be to prepare the final draft of the study which is due to the Legislature on December 15<sup>th</sup>.

David added that we have learned from other ferry systems' experiences as well; we have had extensive conversations with ferry systems that use reservations around the world. We don't need to reinvent the wheel; most ferry systems use reservations and we want to learn as much as we can from others.

Doug agreed; I went to visit BC Ferries, which has some similarities to WSF. They use reservations and it is quite a successful system. We were also visited by representatives from a ferry system in Quebec, who were also looking to implement reservations on their system. Although there are many systems to learn from around the world, WSF is unique and has some unique challenges.

### **Clarifying Questions from Audience**

1. If we get a reservations system, we wouldn't need lots that are much bigger than a ferry load. Would WSF sell the extra land?  
*It's too early in the process to say. My instinct is to say no, because having land is a good thing.*

2. I'm wondering why you haven't considered having reservations for the San Juan Islands in the summer months; just for part of the year.

*That is indeed a possibility. If the Legislature authorizes reservations, we would have that conversation with the community. If it has value only during some parts of the year, it's likely that would happen. We would put together a partnership group like we have done in Port Townsend / Keystone and Edmonds / Kingston so that we could modify the business rules to meet the specific needs of this route.*

3. Is the current thinking to reserve 100% of the boat or less than that?  
*It will be less, but not by much, especially during heavy commute times. There will always be room left on the boats for emergency vehicles and carpools; we always leave space for priority access vehicles. We are looking at up to 90% of the boat. Most other ferry systems do go to 100% reserved, but ours is a public service whereas those others are private interests. We have a public mission to fulfill.*

4. Part of the conversation up here in the islands will be about the ability to make a last minute decision to go off the island. Will you be able to maintain flexibility and access? Has this come up?

*Absolutely. The fear that residents would be pushed out at peak times and the ability for spontaneous travel would go away has come up. We are working on those issues.*

5. If the new ferries aren't big enough to handle the traffic here, BC Ferries has offered to help out, but we will not let them use our docks. Why can't that be done?

*The reality is that we are governed by the Jones Act. We cannot utilize foreign vessels between two domestic ports. We could use a foreign flagged vessel between Anacortes and Sidney, but it could not make stops at any other islands.*

*They allow the cruise liners to do that.*

*No, they are allowed to return their passengers to the point of pickup only.*

6. The FAC has talked about the possibility of some sort of pre-committee to have a dialog about reservations. Would you say that a year from now would be as early as we would need to even think about that?

*The pre-design report will be out this winter and available for anyone who's interested.*

*But the details are route-specific.*

*Yes, there will be some route-specific issues.*

*We would want to have some preliminary discussions; is a year from now a good starting point?*

*You don't have to wait a year, but it will be at least a year or more before reservations come here.*

7. The 4<sup>th</sup> of July was a disaster. We need a different way to handle those summer holiday weekends.  
*Yes, this question came up earlier. The problem we have is a lack of funding for extra service during peak times. We apply the normal summer schedule even during those peak holiday weekends.*  
You have to understand that it decimates the economy of the community. Everyone had an unsatisfactory experience; it's not good for the islands.  
*We understand. Unfortunately we don't have the money and we can only apply what we have to apply. We know it was very difficult but we don't want to promise anything that we can't do. We have the goal to do everything we can to avoid that situation in the future.*  
Maybe you should double the fares on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend so that you can afford extra boats.
8. It would be more effective if we started lobbying now; tell them how it's affecting the local economy.  
*That may get lost in the noise of the massive shortfall.*  
How much exactly are we talking to provide extra boats?  
*I wouldn't know off the top of my head*  
Can you get us that information?  
*Yes.*
9. If we have really slow winters and extra busy summers, why not cut more service in winter and put that money toward summer?  
*We do that now. The winter schedule is the lightest of the whole year. We can reduce it further if you are willing.*
10. Take the two large boats, the Elwha and the Yakima, and make them express boats, one to Orcas and one to Friday Harbor. Then take the two smaller boats and do a combination inter-island, then when they get to Lopez they become express boats.  
*The idea has been tossed around. It's difficult when we have extra stops on the route, from a complexity standpoint. The thought of direct sailings has come up before; it's not clear that they would result in savings.*
11. When you say the 4<sup>th</sup> 64-car boat would be better than no boat at all, I disagree. A 64-car boat here would be worse than the existing situation. I believe the 4<sup>th</sup> 64-car boat would be throwing money away, and I speak for the FAC.  
*The goal is 144-car boats after the three 64s are built. That's what we want.*

The inter-island ferry reached Lopez Island and the meeting started over for those that were just getting on the boat. David went through introductions and the agenda again for the newcomers. Ray then talked about the route-specific issue of the new winter schedule.



### Clarifying Questions from Audience

1. Looking at the current fall schedule westbound, I'm wondering why the 5:30 am boat out of Anacortes couldn't be a milk run and then we could do away with the 6:10 that goes to Friday Harbor. We could save a run; I've been on it and it's not full. Also in the mornings, the 8:50 out of Anacortes could be a milk run, then the 9:35 to Friday Harbor could be eliminated; it's not crowded.

*Winter will have fewer runs than the fall schedule. One of the issues we face is that while some of the boats on the express runs in the morning are not full westbound, if we sent them all the way to Friday Harbor the number of trips would be so reduced that we would not be able to handle the amount of traffic eastbound. The return trips are as important as the trips coming out of Anacortes; we have looked at that and taken it into consideration in the past.*

What about eliminating the 5:30 boat and making the 6:10 a milk run?  
*There is a need for a 6 am boat out of Friday Harbor, so that would affect the return trip.*

2. Will the international run be eliminated in the winter schedule?

Yes.

Is that going to be a continuous thing? And if we can get around the Jones Act and get a boat from BC Ferries could we use that?

*The budget for this route is structured and the Legislature's expectations for service involve keeping the Sidney run. They have asked us to investigate if we could use a foreign flagged vessel for that run.*

3. At what point is the FAC given the information they need to share with residents, like the fall schedule. Do I ask them for that information?

*Yes, the FAC is who we interact with the most for the schedule. The FAC meets monthly on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday in Friday Harbor at 8:30 am to discuss any issues that impact the community. You are welcome to join those meetings. This winter schedule information is being given to you as fast as physically possible.*

David went over the route-specific issue of the loss of touring watches again for any new comers on the boat. There were no questions from the audience concerning this topic.

### Preparing for the 2010 Legislative Session

WSDOT Assistant Secretary David H. Moseley

David discussed the upcoming 2010 Legislative session. As you know WSF was front and center during the 2009 Legislative session, with Plan B in the spotlight.

San Juan Islands Community Meeting Summary

11/5/09

Page 9 of 11

We don't anticipate that same attention in the 2010 session. There are some important things they have asked to see; the reservations pre-design study is one of those. Also they want to see a new accident and incident investigation policy, fuel conservation targets, and information regarding a fuel surcharge in case gas prices spike again. Those are some issues that will be discussed; these are reports on things that the Legislature has asked us to look at, but they are not hot-button issues like the Long-Range Plan last year and the vessel and terminal issues. The JTC (Joint Transportation Committee) is doing a study on alternative funding options for transportation, because the gas tax is dropping as cars become more fuel efficient. In 2016 there is a one billion dollar gap in funding for the ferry system, and we need to fill that gap. That discussion will be occurring more in the 2011 session, but we need to be ready and at the table for those discussions. If there is a comprehensive transportation package for the Legislature to consider we need to be a part of it.

### **Clarifying Questions from Audience**

1. When you say 'accidents', does that include how you handle accidents with cars on the boats?

*Primarily it means damage to vessels, near misses that we need to learn from and investigate, mechanical problems with the vessels, but also our crew and customers getting on and off the boats.*

Some people have had accidents in their cars because of being directed by the ferry crews.

*That would be part of it.*

### **Public Comments & Questions**

1. There was huge problem here on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.  
*We are fully aware of the mess that occurred that weekend. We will do everything we can to alleviate those issues on all the major weekends, but we are not funded for extra service on those weekends. We certainly don't want a repeat of that incident and we are doing what we can. We know it created an economic impact and a negative image for the islands.*
2. I hear what you're saying, but the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July was the second day of the biennium. Are you saying there was no room to put more boats out there and make it up somewhere down the line?  
*That's exactly what I'm saying. That's how we got into trouble last biennium. We were constantly in the red; we can't start out like that.*
3. The problem was not just WSF, for the record. The Anacortes police and the Washington State Patrol were involved with the backup all the way back to the Safeway in town. It took six hours to get through. There should be more collaboration with those other agencies.

## **Conclusion**

The inter-island boat arrived at Orcas; this was the scheduled end time of the meeting. David thanked everyone for coming. Meeting was adjourned.

## **Written Comments Submitted (Transcribed)**

- (Marilyn Parman)  
Possible sources of revenue:
  - a. Luxury taxes (Exp. Cars, boats, jewelry)
  - b. Holiday sur-tax – Restaurants/Lodging
  - c. Federal grants if structured incl. green grantsFuel: Any advances in alternate fuels – related to federal grants?  
How do you get on the ferry schedule?  
Eliminate 9:30 pm (west) milk run on 10:45 ferry fri/sat/sun to minimize isolation between islands relative to activities that should get islands together.